

JACK SMITH

Los Angeles: A Pronouncement

With television rapidly homogenizing the language there may be no point in debating the proper way to say Los Angeles, but it seems that our newscasters, disc jockeys and hucksters haven't yet got together on it themselves, so the citizens remain in disarray.

As I noted the other day, the unfortunately forgotten social critic Will M. Cressy observed in his quaint "History of California," written in 1923, that there were then 26 ways of pronouncing Los Angeles, all wrong.

I suggested that today the pronunciation seems to have stabilized at LOSS (as in profit and loss) . . . ANGE (as in Angie Dickinson) . . . UH (as in uh one and uh two and uh) . . . L'S (pronounced as if there were no vowel as in shameless)

Also, I observed, we still hear radio announcers who say LOHS AHNG HAY LACE or LOSS AN JUH LEEZ, but it may be assumed that they have just drifted into town. I neglected to mention another common variation—a sort of nasalized LAW SANGLUS (with a hard G) which our former Mayor Sam Yorty brought with him from Nebraska and never threw off.

But there are still among us, I have discovered, the Spanish Heritage purists who point out that Los Angeles is in fact a Spanish name and ought to be given its true Spanish pronunciation.

"By now," writes J. D. Foor of Glendale, Ariz., "you should know how to say Spanish words. Los Angeles is one of our favorite and famous Spanish words. The only way to pronounce it is: LOHS AHNG HAY LESS. Other ideas on pronouncing it are gringo ideas."

I am surprised that Foor would write all the way from Arizona to instruct us in the pronunciation of our city's name, but the distance from which his argument reaches us should not be considered a point against its merit.

A man more familiar with the local scene and culture, Alfred Connor Bowman of Hermosa Beach, recalls an interesting bit of history which, if I ever noticed it at all, had slipped my mind.

"I think you should have mentioned," he writes, "that the great sheet you work for carried LOS AHNG HAIL AIS right under the LOS ANGELES on its masthead for many, many years.

"This," he continues, "is substantially the way the name is now pronounced by the disc jockeys you seem to denigrate, and who doubtless learned this pronunciation from The Times at their mother's knees, if that is anatomically possible.

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"Of course this is also the only correct pronunciation, assuming that you are willing to grant Spanish sound values to an obviously Spanish name."

From his previous correspondence and essays, I know Bowman to be a man of formidable erudition and stiff opinion, and I don't care to trifle with either. On the other hand, I don't know any disc jockeys, except on Spanish-language stations, who use the pronunciation he sets forth; but I don't listen much to the radio, except to the news in the car and Lohman and Barkley in the morning, to wake me up, and they both say Los Angeles as if they had just got off the train from Kansas, which I think they did.

However, I am troubled by a discrepancy, however slight, in the two "correct" pronunciations put forth by our man in Arizona, who insists on LOHS AHNG HAY LESS, and by Bowman and The Times of another day—LOS AHNG HAIL AIS.

Being a gringo, I am unable to say which of these versions more closely represents the true Spanish pronunciation. Perhaps there is no true Spanish pronunciation. Perhaps in Spain they have as many ways of saying a particular name as we do.

What troubles me more is Bowman's assertion that this (LOS AHNG HAIL AIS) is the only correct pronunciation, "assuming that you are willing to grant Spanish sound values to an obviously Spanish name."

Well, I'm not willing. Los Ahng Hail Ais would sound affected enough these days, except when falling with its natural music from the lips of our Spanish-speaking citizens. But if Bowman's rule were to be observed, we would have to say Ail Moan Tay for El Monte and Ail Say Goon Dough for El Segundo, which is of course pronounced Elsie Gunndo. I wonder where you'd wind up if you told a taxi driver, "Take me to Ail Moan Tay." Or Los Ahng Hail Ais, for that matter.

But it was always a problem, even before Cressy noted it in 1923. From his trunk of memorabilia Trent Steele of Montebello sends a postcard with a picture of downtown Los Angeles, 1914, and this verse:

"When I came uptown on the bus the porter called 'Loss Anjy-lus!"

But others—when I talked with these—pronounced it thus:

'Los Anjy-lese!"

A few days since a bright young miss surprised me with

'Las Anjy-lis!"

But, 'mongst the cultured, one soon sees, the real thing is

'Lows Ankylese!"

I suppose there will never be any right way to say Los Angeles. But it would be foolish and hopeless to keep it Spanish. It would be unbearable to surrender to Yorty's twang. I suspect in the long run we will be led down some middle road by some new arbiter. Who knows?—perhaps Cal Worthington.